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## Save the Farm: A community rallies around a UBC treasure

**Wendy Holm**

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My first connection with the UBC Farm was a literal one -- leaning into the fridge one morning to get some cream for my coffee, I ran smack into the business end of a colourful rooster, talons extended in full rigor just microns from my nose.

"He'll make a great fricassee" observed Dennis, a grad student in poultry science who couldn't let this beautiful creature go to waste.

Farm life over, it was now dinner. I got it. Later on, it made walking in on the pig carcass suspended over the tub by its trotters from the towel bar a bit easier.

Back in 1973, The UBC Farm was an integrated operation that not only grew vegetables, fruits and grains but was also home to dairy cows, beef cattle, pigs, chickens, turkeys, quail and -- yes -- rabbits.

It was in 1915 that the first dirt was turned to create a farm that would support the research needs UBC's faculty of agriculture. Located on the periphery of the original campus, the Farm shifted gradually southward as the university expanded, coming to rest in its present location in the early 1970's.

Today, the Farm is a 24-hectare parcel of richly cared for farmland and forest buffer that supports the research of some 14 faculties and has grown links that extend, like the tendrils of its pumpkins, beyond the University Gates and deep into the community.

A student-run farmers' market operates from May to October, providing produce, free-range eggs, honey and other farm treats to the more than 18,000 people who visit the farm each year. Some 3,000 children have visited the farm through school programs and summer camps to plant, weed and harvest their own crops. In 2006, 350 student and community volunteers contributed 4,800 hours of farm work. The Urban Aboriginal Community Kitchen Garden Project each year brings 300 aboriginal people from the Downtown Eastside to the Farm to plant, harvest and prepare foods and traditional medicines. The forest buffer that surrounds the farm is habitat to frogs, eagles, hawks, owls and more than 60 other species of birds critical to an integrated farm ecosystem.

Poised for recognition as an international centre of excellence in sustainable agriculture, urban farming and community engagement, the student-driven

Farm and its steward, the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at UBC Farm, have been under the gun for a year now since UBC's campus and community planning process targeted the fertile farmland for housing.

With amazing efficiency and impressive success, students and the community-based Friends of the UBC Farm rallied to save the farm. More than 15,000 signatures were collected. Workshops and open houses organized by campus and community planning to listen to the wishes of the university community have been packed with students and farm supporters explaining -- patiently and not so patiently -- the value of the farm to the faculty, the university and the Metro Vancouver communities it serves. And why it must be protected in its present size and location.

Yet none of the options presented by UBC's campus and community planning office in its fourth (option review) phase of the six-phase planning process reflect this input. All three options shrink the farm from 24 to eight hectares and all relocate some or all of it south.

Communities around the world are scrambling to create, preserve and enhance the production of food in cities. The UBC Farm/Centre for Sustainable Food Systems offers the working model, community engagement and training in urban agriculture, sustainable food production and sustainability that Metro Vancouver will need to get out in front of this trend and create livable communities.

On Friday , more than 100 students, academics and community supporters crowded the Metro Vancouver boardroom, speaking passionately to a motion from Metro's agricultural advisory committee to protect Vancouver's last working farm. And in the end, to its great credit, Metro Vancouver came through, unanimously approving a resolution to call on UBC to retain the 24-hectare Farm at its present location and to designate it as "agricultural use" within the campus plan.

Although Metro Vancouver's jurisdiction is less than clear (it has standing with respect to UBC's official community plan, but not necessarily its campus plan), the public suasion impact of the message is very clear: The highest and best use of the 24 hectares is as a working research farm.

Students have demonstrated amazing leadership in mobilizing support to save the farm. Now its up to the community to push this over the top. The deadline for public input on the "options" is this Friday, Nov. 7. Whether you live in Burnaby, Point Grey, New Westminster or North Vancouver, now is the time to weigh in.

Call or send an e-mail to UBC's campus and community planning department and its board of governors. Tell them you want a "fourth option" that protects the UBC Farm at its current size and location. Tell them that by including the Farm in the Agricultural Land Reserve, the University could protect it in perpetuity and send a clear signal of support for farmland preservation across this province.

The fate of the UBC Farm will be decided over the next few months.

Wendy Holm is a Vancouver-based agrologist and writer.

ONLINE: Should the 24-hectare UBC Farm remain as is?

Vote Yes or No at [vancouver.sun.com/editorial](http://vancouver.sun.com/editorial)

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